

VZCZCXYZ0008  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHLGB #0562/01 1661103  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 151103Z JUN 07  
FM AMEMBASSY KIGALI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4290  
INFO RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA 0078  
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 0887  
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1620  
RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0227  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 0894  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0249

C O N F I D E N T I A L KIGALI 000562

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/15/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [RW](#)  
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT CLOSES INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Classified By: Ambassador Michael R. Arietti, reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (SBU) On June 6, Information Minister Laurent Nkusi canceled the registration to publish he had issued 20 days earlier to the Weekly Post, a new English-language publication. This cancellation occurred just days after the first issue of the Weekly post had appeared. The minister gave no reason for the withdrawal of this registration, either in his letter to the editor of the Weekly Post or in any public statement. When contacted by the embassy, High Press Council Executive Secretary Patrice Maluma equally offered no explanation.

¶2. (SBU) In its inaugural issue, the paper announced itself as a "team of experienced and industrious media practitioners" dedicated to "favorably compete with other media organizations locally and in the region." Written and edited by several former employees of the government aligned New Times (some of whom resigned and some of whom were fired for either personality or policy conflicts), the first edition appeared to be a non-controversial review of local and regional stories. The issue featured a lengthy interview with Ambassador Arietti, speaking on the U.S.-Rwandan relations. Toward the end of the interview, Ambassador Arietti noted that for the U.S., "freedom of the press is one of the fundamental elements of a democratic state," and that "protection of journalists," "professionalism of journalists," and "media laws consistent with international standards," were values to be promoted.

¶3. (SBU) In the following days, Weekly Post employees contacted Mission officers to both express concern for their own safety (alleging they were being accused of being Ugandan "spies"), and offer rationales for the closure. One theory they offered: New Times fear of competition -- the New Times has a virtual monopoly as the only English language daily, with the intermittently published "biweekly" Newsline and Focus its very infrequent English language competitors. Another rationale the journalists offered: possibly having fallen afoul of legal requirements on ownership of the newspaper, given that several of the founding journalists are arguably Ugandan. Media laws require that the publisher and chief editor have their "legal capacity" and "home" in Rwanda.

¶4. (SBU) The New Times has undergone major personnel changes in recent months, losing its editor, managing director, and a number of reporters, several of whom chaffed under the publication's editorial affinity with the GOR and/or the overbearing behavior of now-departed director David Kabuye. Regarding this close alignment with the GOR, we recently learned, for example, that the New Times must clear all front page photos and stories with the Office of

the President. Members of the Board of the New Times includes National Security Chief Emmanuel Ndahiro, Presidential Communications Advisor Alfred Ndahiro (no relation), Central Bank Governor Francois Kanimba, and the head of ORINFOR (the government media conglomerate). The New Times struggles to make a profit, and relies upon extensive GOR advertising to survive.

15. (SBU) Comment. The Minister may have acted beyond his authority. The press law requires new publications to register with the Minister of Information, and to receive acknowledgment in return. As written, this does not appear to be a discretionary function of the minister (unlike radio or TV stations, which require explicit authorization). Contacts on the High Council of the Press say they are exploring this issue. Whatever the legal rationale for closure, the real reason for the closure is unclear. One interpretation relates to reports we hear increasingly from independent journalists that the GOR seeks to squeeze them economically, both by forbidding government offices to print advertisements in their publications, and by quietly calling upon local businesses to advertise only in the New Times or other GOR-aligned outlets. The first charge appears to be true -- scan the pages of independent newspapers Umuseso or Umuco and you see no government adverts. The second appears so far to be a disturbing rumor only -- we have no reports from local businesses that they have been pressured to withhold advertisements. Closure of the Weekly Post would, then, be another effort to reign in independent print media.

16. (C) Comment continued. Another interpretation: reports that Rwandan security services believe that the Weekly Post received support from Ugandan security services -- mirroring the Weekly Post journalists' fears of being accused of being Ugandan spies. This appears farfetched on its face (the first issue of the Weekly Post was entirely innocuous, and hardly a threat to national security), but the GOR is not immune to rumor and over-reaction. Whatever the explanation, the closure is troubling, and inconsistent with GOR assertions that it supports greater media freedom. Ambassador will call upon Information Minister Nkusi at the earliest opportunity to register our concern and seek his explanation. End comment.

ARIETTI